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Overall, the bill totals \$118.7 billion and provides \$72.7 billion in discretionary spending, \$47.7 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$24.8 billion for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC, and \$241 million for related agencies. It is \$3.4 billion more than the President's request and \$8.8 billion more than the historic fiscal year 2008 bill.

"We've increased money for healthcare for veterans and now we're bringing it up to show them that we not only appreciate what they do but we're going to show the heroes that they are by making sure they get the proper healthcare - the best that's available," Wilson said.

The House voted to set the Department of Veterans Affairs spending at \$47.7 billion, \$4.6 billion above 2008 and \$2.9 billion over the President's request, for veterans' medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements. The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients in 2009 including more than 333,275 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (40,000 more than 2008). Some notable provisions include:

**Mental Health Care:** Dedicate a minimum of \$3.8 billion, \$900 million more than 2008, to specialty mental health services for veterans with mental illness, PTSD, and for suicide prevention.

Priority 8 Veterans: \$568 million to increase enrollment of Priority 8 (low to middle income) veterans by 10 percent.

Claims Processors: Increased funding to hire 2,100 additional claims processors to work down the backlog of 390,000 benefits claims and to reduce the 6 month time to process new claims.

Rural Veterans: \$200 million more to provide increased access to local health care providers for veterans and Guard and Reserve members living far away from VA facilities in rural areas.

Maintenance: \$300 million more to address the backlog in maintenance at VA medical facilities to prevent another Walter Reed Annex 18 tragedy.

Prosthetics: \$116 million more to increase availability of new generation prosthetics.

Research: \$58 million more for medical research in trauma, traumatic brain injury, mental health and other areas that are critical to finding the best treatments for our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

Homeless Veterans: \$130 million to provide the additional case workers and medical services needed for our homeless veterans.

Oversight: Additional \$11 million for the Office of Inspector General to provide additional personnel to inspect the community based outpatient clinics and Vet Centers to avoid a Walter Reed scandal in the VA system.

Construction: Increases Department of Veterans Affairs Construction by \$1 billion above the

president's request, which will provide the needed funding for 6 additional major construction projects and an additional 145 minor construction projects that can be completed at VA facilities in fiscal year 2009.

Mileage Reimbursement: Increased funding to raise the gas mileage reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents per mile for veterans traveling distances for care, and a freeze on the associated deductible.

Wilson noted he was particularly pleased with the increased mileage reimbursement. He has heard from many veterans who are very concerned about this particular issue.

"I'm happy that we're finally able to sustain an increased mileage allotment, especially for people in rural areas that have to drive long distance in order to get the healthcare that they need," Wilson said. "This is going to help them be able to get the care they need and to be able to afford to do it."

In addition, the bill set Military Construction spending at \$24.8 billion, \$400 million above the President's request and \$4.2 billion above 2008. The large increase is mostly due to the costs of implementing Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and plans to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps. Some notable provisions include:

2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Re-stationing: \$9.1 billion, \$1.8 billion above 2008 and the same as the President's request, to implement base closures and realignments, and support the re-stationing of 70,000 troops and their families from overseas to the United States.

Quality of Life Initiative: \$336 million, not requested by the President, to continue a quality of life initiative for troops and their families started in the 2008 supplemental including: nearly \$200 million for five new trainee and recruit housing facilities for the Army and Marine Corps to improve the barracks soldiers and marines live in when they train; and \$136 million for medical military construction and planning activities to upgrade substandard medical treatment facilities.

Growing the Force: \$5.6 billion in military construction and family housing, to increase the size of the Army by 65,000, the Marine Corps by 27,000, and the Guard and Reserve by 9,200 personnel.

Military Housing: \$3.2 billion, \$300 million above 2008, to further eliminate inadequate military housing.

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